

Introduction

Excerpt from *Once They Lived in Gloucestershire* by Linda Hart, pgs. 14-17

In the years before and during the First World War, three poets lived near the village of Dymock in the northwest corner of Gloucestershire, and three other poets visited them for various lengths of time. These six poets – the Dymock Poets – were Lascelles Abercrombie, Wilfrid Gibson, John Drinkwater, Rupert Brooke, Robert Frost, Edward Thomas.

They did not come to Dymock as a self-conscious group – and even after their time in Dymock they would not have thought of themselves as “the Dymock Poets” – but the intertwining of their lives and interests began as early as 1908, when Edward Thomas reviewed books of poems by Wilfrid Gibson and Lascelles Abercrombie. By 1912, some of the six had met each other – Brooke and Gibson, for example, meeting for the first time in September 1912. The following year they would see each other’s names in the new *Georgian Anthology* and patron to many poets and artists, also thrived on making introductions.

So in 1913 the six poets would continue to meet one another through Marsh or Monro, or at the Poetry Bookshop, or through other mutual friends. By 1914, four of them – Abercrombie, Gibson, Brooke and Drinkwater – were jointly publishing a magazine of their own poetry called *New Numbers*, and two of them – Frost and Thomas – were forging a friendship to rival that of Byron and Shelley.

One of the Dymock Poets was an American, the others were English, but all of them were caught up in the immense changes taking place in post-Victorian England – changes that affected poetry as much as other aspects of life. During the years in Dymock, five of the six men were in their 30s – Rupert Brooke, the youngest, was in his mid 20s. They were at different stages in their careers and their popularity – in 1912, for example, Wilfrid Gibson and Lascelles Abercrombie were popular poets with many published volumes, while Robert Frost had just arrived from America, an unknown and virtually unpublished poet, and Edward Thomas had not yet begun writing poetry.

But it was the association with a particular place that makes it possible to think of them as a group. Abercrombie moved to Dymock in 1911 and a chain of events followed over the next three years. Gibson left London and moved to Dymock, and Frost arrived shortly afterwards. Thomas began visiting the Frosts, and rented a nearby cottage of the summer of 1914. Soon, however, the war scattered them apart, but their friendships extended well beyond the time in Dymock. There were warm and frequent letters between Thomas and Frost for three years; Abercrombie and Gibson always sent each other their latest publications; Frost's poetry reading at Leeds University in 1928 was arranged by Abercrombie; in 1931 Abercrombie visited Brooke's grave on the Greek island of Skyros; and Frost came back to visit Dymock in 1957.

'The Dymock Poets' as a descriptive phrase was first used in print as the title of a magazine article by John W. Haines in the Autumn 1933 issue of *Gloucestershire Countryside*. Haines was a Gloucester solicitor with a penchant for poetry and botany. He spent time at The Gallows with the Abercrombies, met Gibson, and soon befriended Frost and Thomas. The poets corresponded with him long after the Dymock period ended, and through Haines we know a great deal about them.

Between December 1934 and February 1935 he wrote a series of long articles in the *Gloucester Journal* – one each about Gibson, Abercrombie, Frost and Thomas. Here they are referred to as "Gloucestershire poets" who were once living in "the Dymock country" or "the Leadon Valley" or "that enchanted land". Haines also gave lectures to local societies, and at least one of these was devoted to Edward Thomas.

The next attempt to keep the memory of the Dymock Poets alive was made by Dymock's former vicar, the Rev. J.E. Gethyn-Jones. He took a keen interest in local history, and in 1951, published a book about Dymock with a chapter titled 'Dymock Personalities and Poets'. With much sentimentality, some errors and occasional exaggeration he tells the story of how the six poets came to Dymock. With pride he describes the publication of *New Numbers* and its dispatch from Dymock to "the four corners of the earth". In these volumes, of fifty or sixty pages, were first printed

many poems now known and loved by the entire English speaking and reading world.

He is at his best when describing the countryside that he and they loved:

“Here in our quiet country village they lived. They walked these lanes, these fields, these woods. They sought the first primrose on Hazards bank, the early daffodil in the coppice at Elmbridge by the Leadon stream, and, daintiest of all, the frail bluebell amongst the Ryton Firs...The simple pursuits and pleasures of rural England were to them of the very essence of life, and the fragrance of a spring morning more seductive than all of the perfumes of Arabia. They loved these things, and, because they loved, they wrote of them.” (Gethyn-Jones, p. 110)

Gethyn-Jones was a popular vicar and people in Dymock today still remember his interest in the poets. His book was crucial in establishing the Dymock Poets as a meaningful descriptive phrase and in making people realize that something of literary significance had occurred in Dymock in 1914. Gethyn-Jones’s book even provided a living link with the past by recalling the names of the postmen who stamped the poets’ magazine, *New Numbers*, at Dymock’s post office. In the 1980s, Gethyn-Jones’s interest in the poets was carried on by another vicar of Dymock, the Rev. Reg Legg, who was instrumental in creating a ‘Poets’ Corner’ in Dymock Church, where photographs and poems are on display (the exhibit is open to visitors every day of the year).

In addition to time and place, the concept of the Dymock Poets is also based on their friendship with one another. As with any group of six people, these bonds of friendship were not equal. Abercrombie and Gibson were the long-term residents who provided the geographical focus – the physical cohesion – for the Dymock Poets. Had it not been for the war they might well have gone on living there for many more years. It was Gibson and Abercrombie who provided hospitality for Brooke and Drinkwater (and there were many other visitors as well) and it was their presence that enticed Frost to the area.

Drinkwater and Brooke are linked with the Dymock Poets less through their presence in the area – they were both visitors only – and more through their involvement with *New Numbers*. But this short-live magazine is essential to the

concept of the Dymock Poets and to the sense that here was a productive poetic 'colony'. In addition, Abercrombie, Drinkwater and Brooke shared a passion for the theatre.

Frost and Thomas lived in the area – although Frost did so only for eleven months, and Thomas only for a month although he made several shorter visits. But they were not contributors to *New Numbers*. Their friendship was based on shared interests, similar personalities, and the sense that they were as close as brothers despite not having met until their late 30s. The long walks that Frost and Thomas took, the deep trust that developed, and the literary consequences are the most enticing part of the Dymock story for many people.

Various stories about the poets' time in Dymock have come down to us – in the poetry itself, in the biological accounts, and in letters. As a result we know about an evening at the Gibson's cottage, about a supper where the poets drank too much cider, and about an encounter Frost and Thomas had with an aggressive gamekeeper. But this book is an anthology, not a history or a biography. It is time to turn to the poetry, and let it speak for itself.

Lascelles Abercrombie (1881 – 1938)

Excerpt from *Once They Lived in Gloucestershire* by Linda Hart, pgs. 18-24

Today Lascelles Abercrombie is the least well know of the six Dymock Poets. Keith Clark succinctly summarized the reasons: "his verse seems turgid and wordy, his themes too metaphysical and heavy" (p.31). But Abercrombie and his work were highly admired in the early years of the century. In September 1914, Frost wrote to an American friend about him: "The fellow I am living with at present is the last poetry in your Victorian Anthology. If you want to see him to better advantage you must look him up in the Georgian Anthology where he shows well in a long poem called 'The Sale of St. Thomas'. Or if I can find it I will send you some time the copy of *New Numbers* containing his 'End of the World', a play about to be produced in several places – Birmingham next week, Bristol soon, and Chicago some time this winter." (Frost, p.135-6)

Abercrombie's conviction that poetry was going through an exciting period of change, and his effort to develop (in theory and practice) the concept of realism in poetry, had an important effect on subsequent literary developments. Most important, from our perspective, is that without Abercrombie there would have been no Dymock Poets. He unwittingly began the short-lived literary colony along the Leadon River in a remote corner of Gloucestershire.

Abercrombie was born in Cheshire, and attended school at Malvern College in Worcestershire – thirteen miles from Dymock. He then went to Manchester College in Worcestershire – thirteen miles from Dymock. He then went to Manchester University, where he began writing poetry seriously at the age of 20. But to earn a living he worked as a clerk in a quantity surveyor's office in Liverpool where one of the partners was a family friend (Cooper). His first book of poetry, *Interludes and Poems*, was published in January 1908, and later that same year he became a journalist with the *Liverpool Courier*. Edward Thomas, when reviewing *Interludes and Poems* for the *Daily Chronicle*, wrote to Gordon Bottomley on February 26, 1908: "He is good there is no doubt...[he] has his own vocabulary & a wonderful variety in his blank verse, has certainly his own vision of things, is

perhaps too metaphysical...I wonder what he is like & envy you your chance of knowing him." (Thomas, Bottomley, p.157-8)

"Lascelles had always wanted to live in the country," according to his grandson, Jeff Cooper. In 1907 Abercrombie wrote to Catherine (who was about to become his wife) "It is the proper thing for us...to be together in the country. We are not townsfolk, either of us. We belong to the earth. I do hope I shall so be able to order my life that we can live, really live, in the country." (Cooper)

It was Abercrombie's sister, Ursula, who made his dream come true. She and her husband were friends of Lord Beauchamp, who owned 5,000 or so acres of land around Malvern that stretched as far as Dymock (the pub in Dymock is still named The Beauchamp Arms). Ursula had become a wealthy woman when her husband died in 1907 in a riding accident. Two years later she and her second husband moved to rented accommodation at Hellens, a large 14th-century manor house in the Herefordshire countryside, just a few miles west of Malvern, where Abercrombie had been a student.

She offered to rent a nearby cottage in the village for Lascelles and Catherine, so in April 1910 they ventured south, and moved to Monks Walk Cottage in Much Marcle. Less than six months later he published his long dramatic poem, 'Mary and the Bramble', financing the venture himself. A few months later they moved to a much larger cottage – really two old cottages joined together – in the hamlet of Ryton, less than two miles as the crow flies from the village of Dymock. "The story goes," says Cooper, "that Ursula was out hunting with Lord Beauchamp one day around Ryton when she saw The Gallows empty. She asked him about it and one thing led to another until Lascelles and his family moved in almost exactly a year after moving to Much Marcle."

Here Abercrombie worked as a freelance journalist, contributing regularly to several newspapers, but he also begun to turn out several major dramatic works. It was from their new home that Abercrombie published 'The Sale of Saint Thomas' – which can be described as a long poem or a short play, as verse drama or dramatic verse.

In terms of the Dymock story, the play was important for several reasons. It illustrates the “realism” that characterized the early Georgians, and that was to gain them fame and notoriety in literary circles. There were objections to the self-conscious brutality in the play (Ross, p.127), particularly in a passage about the flies in India that I have included here. The play was also important for a more practical reason: this second experience of publishing Abercrombie’s work must have given the couple the confidence, two years later, to begin publication of *New Numbers*, a quarterly magazine containing work by Abercrombie, Gibson, Drinkwater and Brooke.

The Sale of Saint Thomas was soon reprinted as Abercrombie’s contribution to the new anthology of *Georgian Poetry* (December 1912). The fact that it appeared first in the volume (due to alphabetical order) only partially accounts for the play’s enormous impact. Almost all Georgians “were intent upon restoring drama to poetry. Several also attempted to restore poetry to drama.” (Ross p.121) Abercrombie tried to do both. *The Nation* reviewer (March 8, 1913) noted Abercrombie’s “astonishing power of dramatic psychological analysis. He is a vehement, imaginative thinker.” *The Times Literary Supplement* thought his was the most important poetic talent since the turn of the century (Hassall, Marsh, p.686). Abercrombie was now a poet to be reckoned with and this must have encouraged Wilfrid Gibson, a year later, to move to cottage a mile north of Dymock and two miles on lanes and tracks from the Abercrombies.

The admiration was mutual. Abercrombie had favourably reviewed Gibson’s *Daily Bread* in 1910. And when he reviewed *Georgian Poetry 1911-1912* (in the *Manchester Guardian*, January 8, 1913) he singled out Gibson because he said Gibson’s work illustrated better than anyone’s how contemporary poetry was dealing with new themes but respecting the traditional conventions.

Abercrombie’s most important review, for our purposes, was a very long and thorough one in *The Nation* (June 13, 1914) of Frost’s second book, *North of Boston*. Walsh calls it “a pioneer review”, based on “reasoned literary principles”, the first one to evaluate seriously the sound-of-sense ideas (Walsh, p.170). John Haines sent the review to Frost, who replied from Little Iddens: “I liked it very well. The

discussion of my technique wouldn't have been what it was if Abercrombie had had nothing to go on but the book. He took advantage of certain conversations in which I gave him the key to my method and most of his catchwords." But Frost recognized that "it was a generous review to consider me in all ways so seriously and as I say I liked it." (Frost, p.127)

This review, with phrases like "unique and entirely original", was reprinted in a Boston newspaper, bringing Frost's name to public attention in American literary circles for the first time. Soon after arriving back in America in 1915 he was being hailed as a successful poet. Frost realized that this was a crucial review, and wrote to Abercrombie from New Hampshire in September 1915: "Yours was the first praise over there, and there will never be any other just like it." (Frost, p93)

When Abercrombie wasn't working, he and Catherine must have been welcoming and easy-going hosts. Frost, Drinkwater and Brooke, as well as John Haines, Eddie Marsh, and the Gloucestershire poet Ivor Gurney have all commented on the happy times they spent with the Abercrombies at Ryton. The primitive washing facilities seem to have made the place even more endearing to them. The Frost family lived at The Gallows for five months and he obviously felt sentimental about his time there. A letter to Abercrombie from New Hampshire in September 1915 says "Now I should like to go out into the yard and shake hands with your big cold pump till his iron tank was as full of water as my heart is of Ryton memories." (Frost, p.193)

Abercrombie's next verse drama, *The End of the World*, had as big an impact as *Saint Thomas*. Eddie Marsh was the first to enthuse about it. On August 17, 1913 he visited The Gallows for the first time and wrote to Brooke with glowing descriptions of the bucolic scene (including the bathroom, "a shed out of doors, with a curtain instead of a door"), of how he enjoyed cutting up French beans and peeling potatoes, and of his "longish walk with L.A. – it's lovely country and we climbed a hill...and he made me swill 'mild' at every pub". Abercrombie, working on *The End of the World* at this time, read the beginning of it to Marsh, who told Brooke it was "magnificent" (Hassall, Marsh, p. 241-2)

In February 1914 Marsh returned to Dymock, partly to see the newly married Gibson who was living near Abercrombie. He wrote to Brooke in Tahiti about his weekend at The Old Nailshop with “the Wilfrids who seem flawlessly happy...The Lascelles dined with us on Sat. and we with them on Sunday...L. read out his *End of the World*, now finished, and to appear in the 2nd N.N. It’s a sublime work, in its fusion of poetry and comedy there has been nothing like it...We had a lovely walk, it’s beautiful country...” (Hassall, Marsh, p.268)

The following month Abercrombie went to London as Marsh’s guest for five days. Again, Marsh wrote to Brooke, describing the whirlwind of lunches, teas and dinners with famous people that he laid on for Abercrombie – “Lascelles is almost speechless with admiration, he didn’t know there *were* such people” – as well as trips to the theatre, to the House of Commons to hear Winston Churchill deliver a speech and to the Poetry Bookshop where Abercrombie did a reading from *The End of the World*. Marsh reported, “L. is rewarding me with the dedication of *The End of the World*, which will in itself assure me of immortality.” (Hassall, Marsh, p.273)

The End of the World was published in April 1914, in the second issue of *New Numbers*. Brooke, sending a copy of *New Numbers* to Mrs. Chauncey Wells, said: “There’s some awfully good Abercrombie in it; and we’re rather proud of the whole thing.”

Abercrombie, later in life and after more successes, became a respected professor at Liverpool University, Leeds University, Bedford College (London) and Merton College (Oxford). He also wrote several books, such as *The Idea of Great Poetry* (1925) and *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1932). While Professor of English Poetry at Leeds University, he arranged for Frost to give a poetry reading there on his 1928 visit to England. Abercrombie received many honorary degrees and became a Fellow of the Royal Academy in 1937. In 1930, his collected poems and plays were published. With characteristics, modesty and regret, he wrote in the Preface: “The invitation to collect these pieces by the Oxford University Press was one which I could not but accept with the keenest pleasure; I allowed it to overbear a certain unwillingness to bring together poems which, to me, must chiefly represent unrealized ambition.”

In 1932, Abercrombie looked back wistfully on his years at Dymock:

"I have lived in a cottage in the daffodil country, and I have, for a time, done what I wanted to do...and I have know what it is to have Wilfrid Gibson and Robert Frost for my neighbours; and John Drinkwater, Rupert Brooke, Edward Thomas, Will Davies, Bob Trevelyan, Arthur Ransome, have drunk my cider, talked in my garden. I make no cider now, and I have no garden. But once I lived in Gloucestershire." (Gawsworth, pp.20-21)

The End of the World

By Lascelles Abercrombie

The End of the World tells the story of a stranger (later revealed to be a dowser) who arrives at a pub in a remote valley. Although there are few clues as to the identity of the place – but note the reference to the red earth – it would be nice to think that Abercrombie had in mind a village and pub somewhere near May Hill in Gloucestershire. The stranger tells the villagers that the comet is heading towards earth and everything will be destroyed. After much discussion and the passage of time, they discover that they have been hoaxed and the dowser is “a tramping conjurer.”

SOLLERS. I know what's in his mind. When I was young
 My mother would catch us frogs and set them down,
 Lapt in a screw of paper, in the ruts,
 And carts going by would quash 'em; and I'd laugh,
 And yet be thinking, 'Suppose it was myself
 Twisted stiff in huge paper, and wheels
 Big as a wall of a barn treading me flat!'
 HUFF. I know what's in his mind: just madness it is.
 He's lookt too hard at his fellows in the world;
 Sight of their monstrous hearts, like devils in cages,
 Has jolted all the gearing of his wits.
 It needs a tough brain, ay, a brain like mind,
 To pore on ugly sin and not go mad.
 STRANGER. Madness! You're not far out. – I came up here
 To be alone in my dreadful mind. The path,
 Of red sand trodden hard, went up between
 High hedges overgrown of hawthorn blowing
 White as clouds; ay, it seemed burrowed through
 A white sweet-smelling cloud, - I walking there
 Small as a hare that runs its tunneled drove
 Thro' the close heather. And beside my feet
 Blue greygles drifted gleaming over the grass;
 And up I climb to sunlight green in birches,
 And the path turned to daisies among grass
 With bonfires of the broom beside, like flame
 Of burning straw: and I lookt into your valley.
 I could scarce look.
 Anger was smarting in my eyes like grit.
 O the fine earth and fine all for nothing!
 Mazed I walkt, seeing and smelling and hearing:
 The meadow lands all shining fearfully gold, -
 Cruel as fire the sight of them toucht my mind;
 Breathing was all a honey taste of clover

And bean flowers: I would have rather had it
 Carrion, or the stink of smouldering brimstone.
 And larks aloft, the happy piping fools,
 And squealing swifts that slid on hissing wings,
 And yellowhammers playing spry in hedges:
 I never noted them before; but now –
 Yes, I was mad, and crying mad, to see
 The earth so fine, fine all for nothing!

Excerpt Two: Merrick is the village smith. Once the villagers see the comet in the sky, and accept that it will soon land in their valley, they begin reflecting on their lives and the meaning of life in general.

MERRICK. 'Twas bound to come sometime,
 Bound to come, I suppose. 'Tis a poor thing
 For us, to fall plumb in the chance of it;
 But, now or another time, 'twas bound to be, -
 I have been thinking back. When I was a lad
 I was delighted with my life: there seemed
 Naught but things to enjoy. Say we were bathing:
 There'd be the cool smell of the water, and cool
 The splashing under the trees: but I did loathe
 The sinking mud slithering round my feet,
 And I did love to loathe it so! And then
 We'd troop to kill a wasp's nest; and for sure
 I would be stung; and if I liked the dusk
 And singing and the game of it all, I loved
 The smart of the stings, and fleeing the buzzing furies.
 And sometimes I'd be looking at myself
 Making so much of everything; there'd seem
 A part of me speaking about myself:
 'You know, this is much more than being happy.
 'Tis hunger of some power in you, that lives
 On your heart's welcome for all sorts of luck,
 But always looks beyond you for its meaning.
 And that's the way the world's kept going on,
 I believe now. Misery and delight
 Have both had liking welcome from it, both
 Have made the world keen to be glad and sorry.
 For why? It felt the living power thrive
 The more it made everything, good and bad,
 Its own belonging, forged to its own affair, -
 The living power that would do wonders some day,
 I don't know if you take me?

SOLLERS. I do, fine;
 I've felt the very thought go through my mind

When I was at my wains; though 'twas a thing
Of such a flight I could not read its colour. –
Why was I like a man sworn to a thing,
Working to have my wains in every curve,
Ay, every tenon, right as they should be?
But to keep in me living at its best
The skill that must go forward and shape the world,
Helping it on towards its materpiece.
MERRICK. And never was there aught to come of it!
The world was always looking to use its life
In some great handsome way at last. And now –
We are just fooled. There never was any good
In the world going on or being at all.
The fine things life has plotted to do are worth
A rotten toadstool kickt to flying bits.
End of the World? Ay, and the end of a joke.

Rupert Brooke (1887 – 1915)

Excerpt from *Once They Lived in Gloucestershire* by Linda Hart, pgs. 77-83

Most people think of Brooke as a war poet, despite the fact that only a small percentage of his poetic output occurred after the outbreak of war. Pedants might argue that Brooke wasn't really a "Dymock Poet." They could point out that he visited the area on only two occasions (unless other visits went unrecorded and biographers have found no evidence of them). Both visits were brief, and there isn't any one poem that was written while he was in the area or has any theme deriving specifically from it. On the other hand, 'The Soldier', one of the most famous sonnets in the English language, appeared in *New Numbers*, which was edited by Abercrombie and Gibson who decided to change the name from 'The Recruit' to 'The Soldier.' It might even be claimed that without the final issue of *New Numbers*, there might never have been any war poems from Brooke.

Brooke's initial link with the Dymock Poets was through Eddie Marsh, whose moral and financial support was crucial for many young artists rebelling against the Victorian and Edwardian eras. Marsh not only edited *Georgian Poetry*, but is also credited with successfully marketing it (in today's terminology). "Marsh took the first significant step toward making modern poetry popular," concluded Ross (p.108). Marsh's money underpinned the publication of *Georgian Poetry*, and later of *New Numbers*. Marsh doted on Brooke; as a result there were introductions to politicians and actresses as well as artists and writers. Through Marsh's generosity, Brooke had a base in London – a room in Marsh's spacious flat at Gray's Inn. Brooke's first meeting with Drinkwater was during lunch at the flat in September 1912, arranged to discuss the possible publication of works by the new 'Georgian' poets. Gibson was there too, having met Brooke for the first time a few days earlier. When Marsh visited Dymock to see Abercrombie and Gibson in 1913 and 1914, he sent long letters to Brooke (who was abroad for a year) about how he spent his time and what the two poets were writing. Marsh also served as a post office while Brooke was away, forwarding poems for *New Numbers* to the editorial office at The Gallows.

Brooke, often accompanied by Marsh, saw several of the Dymock Poets in London. Brooke was occasionally at the St. George's restaurant (where Thomas first met Frost), or reading poems at the Poetry Bookshop, and there were meals with Eddie Marsh to which Gibson, Drinkwater and others were invited. Gibson attended Brooke's farewell party on 20 May 1913 before he set sail for America. When Brooke returned a year later from his travels in North America and the South Seas, a party was arranged for Thursday, June 11, 1914, which Gibson attended. The next evening, Abercrombie dined with Brooke and Marsh at Simpsons, along with some Americans Brooke had met in Chicago. This was the first time Brooke and Abercrombie met. The next night, joined by Gibson and Monro, they all went to the ballet and talked late into the night. (Turner, p.136)

Thomas and Brooke visited each other (in Steep and Cambridge) in 1910, although Brooke went to Steep with dual purpose. He was in love with Noel Olivier, a pupil at the nearby Bedales School, and arranged to see her at the same time that he was visiting Thomas. Thomas reviewed Brooke's *Poems 1911* in the *Daily Chronicle* and forecast that Brooke would be a great poet. "Copies should be bought by every one over forty who has never been under forty. It will be a revelation," he told readers. (Turner, p.88) In May 1913, Brooke wrote to apologise for not coming to see Thomas before leaving for America: "I sail next Thursday. I shall stay – I don't know how long. Perhaps next March's primroses'll fetch me back." Brooke asked if Thomas would be in London early next week. "If so you might charge me with some message for the continent of America...and I could leave the muses of England in your keeping – I do that anyhow." (Brooke, p.459)

Brooke had strong attachments to people throughout his life whom he did not see as much as he would have wished. The main evidence of his attachment to Abercrombie and Gibson is his instructions to his mother and to Marsh to make them recipients of his royalties, his capital allowance and the inheritance he would have had from her. A month before his death, Brooke wrote to Marsh: "I've tried to arrange that some money should go to Wilfrid & Lascelles & de la mare to help them write good stuff, instead of me." (Keynes, p.669) When one considers the wide range of friends Brooke had – through Cambridge, Bloomsbury, the Fabian Society and

Eddie Marsh among others – his concern to ensure that Gibson and Abercrombie were beneficiaries is more significant than time spent – or not spent – in Dymock.

When Brooke sent Gibson a copy of 'The Soldier' it was titled 'The Recruit'. Gibson thought that 'The Soldier' would be better, and that is how it was always appeared. There is no published evidence as to whether this was discussed with Brooke.

While the poem made Brooke famous, it also drew attention to *New Numbers* and put Dymock on the literary map of England. Marsh sent Brooke, aboard his troopship, a glowing review of *New Numbers 4* from the *Times Literary Supplement*, which singled out Brooke's war sonnets for their selfless patriotism. He also sent a clipping from *The Times* reporting that on April 5 (Easter Sunday) Dean Inge had read 'The Soldier' from the pulpit of St. Paul's and then remarked that Brooke would rank "with our great poets;" however, while admiring Brooke's patriotism, the Dean also criticized the absence of Christian sentiment in the poem. When his friend, Denis Browne, visited his cabin to say he had seen the article from *The Times*, a very ill Brooke could only mumble that he was sorry Dean Inge did not think him quite as good as Isaiah. (Hassall, Brooke, p.507)

These were almost the last words he spoke. He died two days later, on April 23, and is buried on the Greek Island of Skyros. In a letter to Robert Frost in May 1915, Thomas said that he was re-reading Rupert Brooke and writing an article about him: "You heard perhaps that he died on April 23rd of sunstroke on the way to the Dardanelles? All the papers are full of his 'beauty' and of an eloquent last sonnet beginning 'If I should die'. He was eloquent. Men never spoke ill of him." (Thomas, p.109)

'The Dead'

By Rupert Brooke

These hearts were woven of human joys and cares,
 Washed marvelously with sorrow, swift to mirth.
 The years had given them kindness. Dawn was theirs,
 And sunset, and the colours of earth.
 These had seen movement, and heard music; known
 Slumber and walking; loved; gone proudly friended;
 Felt the quick stir of wonder; sat alone;
 Touched flowers and furs and cheeks. All this is ended.

There are waters blown by changing winds to laughter
 And lit by the rich skies, all day. And after,
 Frost, with a gesture, stays the waves that dance
 And wandering loveliness. He leaves a white
 Unbroken glory, a gathered radiance,
 A width, a shining peace, under the night.

'The Soldier'

By Rupert Brooke

If I should die, think only this of me:
 That there's some corner of a foreign field
 That is for ever England. There shall be
 In that rich earth is richer dust concealed;
 A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
 Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
 A body of England's, breathing English air,
 Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
 A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
 Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
 Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
 And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
 In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

Wilfrid Wilson Gibson (1878-1962)

Excerpt from *Once They Lived in Gloucestershire* by Linda Hart, pgs. 38-42

Today it is difficult to realize how popular Gibson was in the second decade of this century – popular for both his poetry and his personality. Brooke and Frost took to him instantly – he must have had a warm and easy-going temperament – and everyone had a good word to say about him. “I have no friend here like Wilfrid Gibson,” wrote Frost to an American friend in March 1914. (Frost, p.12) Brooke affectionately called him ‘Wibson’ and his letters to Marsh and others are full of concern for Gibson’s well being and comments about how nice he is. D.H. Lawrence wrote to Eddie Marsh in November 1913 that “I think Gibson is one of the clearest and most loveable personalities I know.” (Hassall, Marsh, p.261) John Middleton Murry, in a letter of reminiscence to Christopher Hassall, says, “We quickly introduced Wilfrid to Eddie [Marsh]...and Eddie took to him as naturally as we had done, for his singular integrity.” (Hassall, Marsh, p.216)

Around 1906 Gibson ceased writing pseudo-Tennysonian verse and began writing realistic poems in which he tried to reflect the speech of ordinary people, based on events arising out of his everyday life in Northumberland and later Glasgow. By 1912, “of all the younger English poets of the day, only one, John Masefield with his ‘The Everlasting Mercy’, could challenge Gibson in the matter of general popularity.” (Walsh, p.155-6) Poet Laureate Robert Bridges praised his “very remarkable” contributions to *Georgian Poetry*. In 1913, Frost wrote to another friend that “He is much talked of in America at the present time. He’s just one of the plain folks with none of the marks of the literary poseur about him.” (Walsh, p.157)

Two volumes of Gibson’s poems – *Daily Bread* (1910) and *Fires* (1912) – impressed Frost, partly for their colloquial style but also because they provided evidence that there was a market for poems about ordinary people and everyday happenings. *Daily Bread* went into a third printing in 1913 – the year when Frost’s first volume was published. Gibson was thought of as a poet concerned with the problems of common humanity. Frost and others may have jokingly referred to him as “the People’s Poet”. After Frost and Thomas had an unpleasant encounter with a gameskeeper in the woods behind Abercrombie’s house, Frost wrote to a friend that

he would now have a better claim than Gibson "to the title of the People's Poet".
(Frost, p.142)

Gibson left his native Northumberland and moved to London in the summer of 1912. He worked as assistant editor for *Rhythm*, a poetry magazine being produced by John Middleton Murry and Katherine Mansfield. His salary, small but essential for his upkeep, was paid anonymously by Eddie Marsh, and it was Marsh who introduced him to Rupert Brooke on September 17, 1912. This "proved to be one of the important moments in Gibson's life." (Hassall, Marsh, p.189) Just three days later, Gibson, at Brooke's invitation, attended the very first meeting to discuss the publication of *Georgian Poetry*. In November 1912, he moved into a small room above Harold Monro's Poetry Bookshop a couple of months before it officially opened. Here he was well placed to become even more a part of the London literary scene.

Wilfrid Gibson had read and admired Robert Frost's *A Boy's Will* when it was published early in 1913. That August he wrote to Frost, whom he had not met, urging him to bring some of his new poems to the Poetry Bookshop. Frost did so, and Gibson wrote a poem called 'The First Meeting'. Given their subsequent reputations today, this poem reminds us that at the time Gibson was the famous poet and Frost relatively unknown. Gibson wanted Frost to meet Abercrombie, and invited him to a poetry reading that Abercrombie was giving at the Poetry Bookshop. In December 1913, Gibson was married in Dublin to Harold Monro's secretary, Geraldine Townshend. The Gibsons spent their honeymoon at The Gallows, while the Abercrombies were away, and soon afterwards they moved to a thatched cottage called The Old Nailshop. It was two miles west of Abercrombie's cottage, and on the road from Dymock and Ledbury.

Gibson had already suggested to Frost that he should leave Beaconsfield and come to live near Dymock. Early in 1914 the Gibsons found a place for the Frosts and their four children to live, two miles from The Old Nailshop, on the other side of the River Leadon. Geraldine Gibson wrote to Elinor Frost on 25 February 1914 that "We have just this moment got your husband's letter saying you are coming here. We are absolutely rejoiced...how perfectly splendid!" (Francis, p.83) In February

1914 marsh wrote to Brooke, after a weekend at The Old Nailshop discussing *Georgian Poetry II*, “W. hasn’t really begun writing again yet, but he soon will, he feels the stirrings.” (Hassall, Marsh, p.268) When he did begin, he wrote in typical Gibson fashion about the every day things that surrounded him, and particularly the cottage that he and Geraldine loved dearly.

‘The Old Nail-Shop’, published in *New Numbers* 4, is one of the many poems about the cottage; it shows Gibson’s sense of history and continuity as well as his sympathy with poor rural folk. But the most important poem about the cottage, for Dymock Poet aficionados, is ‘The Golden Room’. It describes the scene inside, on the only night we know for sure that five of the six Dymock Poets (not Drinkwater) were together for an evening. Dedicated to his wife and published in a volume of the same name in 1927, ‘The Golden Room’ is less than satisfactory as a poem but it accurately catches the nuances in style and personality of the poets.

The evening in question – most likely June 24, 1914, despite the fact that Gibson later remembered it as July – is almost certainly the night referred to in Thomas’s letter of June 27. Brooke had just returned from his year of travels, and wanted to see Abercrombie and Gibson about *New Numbers*; Thomas and his wife were on a short holiday, possibly getting over a period of domestic discord. The poem captures Frost’s intellect and expansiveness, Thomas’s shyness, Brooke’s merriment; but it also captures the pain that Gibson still felt – a decade later – about how the war had ended it all. One year and two weeks after this golden evening, Eddie Marsh retreated to the attic room of Gibson’s cottage to spend eight days writing his celebrated memoir of Rupert Brooke.

The Great Western Railway offered special excursions to see the wild daffodils for which Dymock and Newent were (and still are) famous. It’s not surprising that Gibson wrote a poem called ‘Daffodils’. It tells of a man reminiscing about his son, Jack, now off fighting “in a bloody trench” but who, 18 years ago, had enjoyed picking and sniffing the daffodils. It was published in *An Annual of New Poetry* (1917), edited by Gordon Bottomley – the same volume that contained Edward Thomas’s first published poems.

Gibson's work was popular in America, and in 1917, he went on a successful reading tour there. When he returned to England in July, the Army Service Corps finally accepted for duties at Sydenham, near London, for the remaining twelve months of the war. His son, Michael, was born in 1918, and Abercrombie became his godfather. When Robert and Elinor Frost came to England again in 1928 they visited the Gibsons, and Wilfrid not only wrote a poem called 'Reunion' but also dedicated his next book, *Hazards*, in which the poem first appeared, "To Robert and Elinor Frost". Gibson continued to publish a book of poems every couple of years or so until 1950, and he continued to go on lecture and reading tours around Britain. But his themes and the treatment he gave them seemed increasingly superficial to the modern world. His work declined in popularity to such an extent that it is hardly known today. "I am one of those unlucky writers whose books have predeceased him," he wrote to Frost in 1939. (Francis, p.190)

It would be hard to over-estimate the significance of the Dymock period to Gibson, and the domestic bliss he found with Geraldine in their old nail-shop, facing on to an even older track called The Greenway, two miles north of Dymock. When his *Collected Poems* were published in 1926, he placed at the very front of the volume an untitled poem – printed in italics – that begins 'So long had I travelled the lonely road'.

'So long had I travelled the lonely road'

By Wilfrid Gibson

So long had I travelled the lonely road,
Though now and again a wayfaring friend
Walked shoulder to shoulder and lightened the load
I often would think to myself as I strode –
No comrade will journey with you to the end.

And it seemed to me, as the days went past
And I gossiped with cronies or brooded alone
By wayfaring fires, that my fortune was cast
To sojourn by other men's hearths to the last
And never to come to my own hearthstone.

The lonely road no longer I roam:
We met, and were one in the heart's desire:
Together we came through the wintry gloam
To the little old house by the Greenway home
And crossed the threshold and kindled the fire.

'The Golden Room'

By Wilfrid Gibson

Do you remember that still summer evening
 When, in the cosy cream-washed living-room
 Of The Old Nailshop, we all talked and laughed –
 Our neighbours from The Gallows, Catherine
 And Lascelles Abercrombie; Rupert Brooke;
 Elinor and Robert Frost, living a while
 A Little Iddens, who'd brought over with them
 Helen and Edward Thomas? In the lamplight
 We talked and laughed; but, for the most part, listened
 While Robert Frost kept on and on and on,
 In his slow New England fashion, for our delight,
 Holding us with shrewd turns and racy quips,
 And the rare twinkle of his gray blue eyes?

We sat there in the lamplight, while the day
 Died from rose-latticed casements, and the plovers
 Called over the low meadows, till the owls
 Answered them from the elms, we sat and talked –
 Now, a quick flash from Abercrombie; now,
 A murmured dry half-heard aside from Thomas;
 Now, a clear laughing word from Brooke; and then
 Again Frost's rich and ripe philosophy
 That had the body and tang of good draught-cider,
 And poured as clear a stream.

'Twas in July
 Of nineteen-fourteen that we sat and talked:
 Then August brought the war, and scattered us.

Now, on the crest of an Aegean isle,
 Brooke sleeps, and dreams of England: Thomas lies
 'Neath Vimy Ridge, where he, among his fellows,
 Died, just as life had touched his lips to song.

And nigh as ruthlessly has life divided
 Us who survive; for Abercrombie toils
 In a black Northern town, beneath the glower
 Of hanging smoke; and in America
 Frost farms once more; and, far from The Old Nailshop
 We sojourn by the Western sea.

And yet,
 Was it for nothing that the little room,

All golden in the lamplight, thrilled with golden
Laughter from hearts of friends that summer night?
Darkness has fallen on it; and the shadow
May never more be lifted from the hearts
That went through those black years of war, and live

And still, whenever men and women gather
For talk and laughter on a summer night,
Shall not that lamp rekindle; and the room
Glow once again alive with light and laughter;
And, like a singing star in time's abyss,
Burn golden-hearted through oblivion?

John Drinkwater (1882-1937)

Excerpt from *Once They Lived in Gloucestershire* by Linda Hart, pgs. 64-67

Of the six Dymock Poets, John Drinkwater was the most versatile as an artist. He was a poet, playwright, essayist, anthologist, actor, theatre producer and director, in addition to his day-to-day job as manager of Barry Jackson's Birmingham Repertory Theatre – described by Drinkwater as “the most distinguished playhouse in the country” when it opened in February 1913 (Drinkwater, *Discovery*, p.232). He gradually got to know each of the Dymock Poets in turn, although his connections with Frost and Thomas seem fairly inconsequential.

Drinkwater grew up with a deep passion for the countryside of Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Oxfordshire (Drinkwater, *Inheritance*, chaps 32 to 35). He left Oxford High School at 15 and worked at an insurance company in Nottingham. The hours were long and the work tedious, but he read widely and began to write poetry. When the firm moved him to Birmingham at the turn of the century, he became involved with amateur dramatics, which he had always loved. In 1910, he left his job to work with Barry Jackson and The Pilgrim Players – one of the provincial repertory companies popular at this time.

Drinkwater's first book, *Lyrical and Other Poems*, was published by Harold Monro's Samurai Press in 1908 (also Gibson's publisher at the time). Drinkwater's second volume, *Poems of Men and Hours*, was published by David Nutt in 1911. This is the same publishing house that produced Frost's first volume of poetry, *A Boy's Will*, in 1913. Frost's grand-daughter thinks that Drinkwater may well have been the unknown reader who advised Mrs. Nutt to accept Frost's manuscript containing the poems that became *A Boy's Will* (Francis, p.211).

In 1911, Drinkwater became president of the Birmingham Dramatic and Literary Club, and met many artists and writers as a result. He began corresponding with Gibson at this time about the possibility of producing a dramatic poem from Gibson's *Daily Bread*. Gibson didn't travel to Birmingham to see the performance nor the production a few months later of another dramatic poem of his. In fact, Gibson

soon decided that he was “not much drawn to the theatre as a medium of expression. I know this is heresy nowadays,” he confessed to Drinkwater (Drinkwater, *Discovery*, p.214). But Drinkwater loved the theatre, and spent the rest of his life writing plays, directing them and performing them.

But it was poetry that led to his meeting with Abercrombie. After reading a laudatory but unsigned article in *The Nation* about a book of his poems, Drinkwater made some inquiries and learned that Abercrombie was the reviewer. This “greatly added to my pleasure in the praise, as I knew and greatly admired his *Interludes*” (Drinkwater, *Discovery*, p.218). So Drinkwater wrote and introduced himself to Abercrombie, and in May 1911, he made the first of many visits to The Gallows. “I was enchanted by it and by my first sight of Gloucestershire landscape, but most by meeting the poet whom I so much admired...I had been working hard and was tired, but I sat into the night with a delighted sense of refreshment.” Unfortunately, they drank a good deal of “mulled cider literally laced with rum” and during the night Drinkwater woke the Abercrombies and announced that he was about to die (Drinkwater, *Discovery*, p.211).

In September 1912, Drinkwater invited Gibson (whom he had never met) and Abercrombie to visit him in Birmingham. “The visit was, for us all I think, a memorable success,” recalled Drinkwater, “and lifelong attachments sprang from it” (*Discovery*, p.216). “Between Wilfrid Wilson Gibson, Lascelles Abercrombie, and myself there was from the first a bond of affectionate understanding. We really liked each other’s work, and took pleasure in saying so. I thought that they were among the best poets of their time, as I still do, and I hoped to see them adding power to the revival of poetic drama in the theatre which I then thought was coming.” (*Discovery*, p.213)

In 1912, Drinkwater was asked by Middleton Murry and Katherine Mansfield to contribute to *Rhythm* (later called *Blue Review*). He saw Harold Monro on his visits to London, wrote frequently for *The Poetry Review* and was invited by Monro to Eddie Marsh’s meeting in September 1912 to discuss the idea of an anthology of contemporary English poetry. This became *Georgian Poetry*, and Drinkwater, along with Gibson and Abercrombie, were regular contributors. At this meeting,

Drinkwater met Brooke for the first time (three days after Brooke had met Gibson for the first time). Brooke was “then the most noted young man in London,” according to Drinkwater. They left the meeting together, and walked to Holborn, with Brooke promising to send Drinkwater his book of poems. (Drinkwater, *Discovery*, p.228)

When Brooke sent Drinkwater *Poems 1911* he wrote that he was “feeling much excited” about the new repertory work in Birmingham (Drinkwater, p.20). Brooke’s great interest in the theatre must have added to the intellectual attraction between these two men. Brooke had been deeply involved with the Marlowe Dramatic Society at Cambridge, and was working on *John Webster and the Elizabethan Drama* when he met Drinkwater. This 30,000-word essay, a fine piece of literary criticism still cited as an authoritative work today, won Brooke a Fellowship to King’s in March 1913. That same month he visited Drinkwater in Birmingham; “we stayed up most of the night talking,” says Drinkwater. In May, just before his trip to America, Brooke sent Drinkwater a play he had written called *Lithuania*. Drinkwater attended the reunion supper for Brooke when he returned from his travels abroad in June 1914, and later Brooke went to Birmingham where, recalls Drinkwater, “we exhausted the complete theory of drama in a tea-shop, went to a Promenade Concert afterwards, and again talked till morning. Also he arranged to take Lascelles Abercrombie, Wilfrid Gibson, and myself in a motor-car to some quiet place where we could discuss *New Numbers*.” (Drinkwater, p.20-21) But the trip never took place.

With war threatening in the early summer of 1914, Brooke and Drinkwater managed to meet a couple of times for lunch in Soho, and Drinkwater recalls “the note of foreboding...that seemed to touch all his words thereafter till the end.” (Drinkwater, p.21) When Brooke wrote to Marsh saying that royalties from his book should go to Gibson, Abercrombie and de la Mare if he dies, Brooke put in brackets that “John is childless”. Although no surname was used, this most likely referred to Drinkwater and explains why Brooke didn’t include him as a beneficiary.

Drinkwater continued to write poetry in the years following the Dymock idyll. A volume of poems called *Swords and Ploughshares* was published in 1915. In

1916, Drinkwater published *Olton Pools*, which contained 'Immortality' –a poem that mentions Dymock and, at least in the first six lines, sounds as if it could have been written by Brooke rather than Drinkwater. It seems likely that Brooke is the friend ("who died in his young beauty") referred to in part II. The references to seas and Dymock orchards obviously have connections with Brooke.

Another poem that mentions Dymock – and shows the lasting influence of his visits to the area – is 'Blackbird'. It was published in *Loyalties* in 1919. But the Drinkwater poem most redolent of Dymock is 'Daffodils', also from *Olton Pools*. Here are references to Dymock, Ryton woods, friends who make rhymes, and daffodils that are aglow – as they still are today although not in such profusion as when the poets were there. At about this time Drinkwater moved to Far Oakridge to be near William Rothenstein and to live in this corner of what he called the "enchanted Cotswold country". Later he was involved in the early days of the Malvern Festival, which was founded by his good friend and colleague Barry Jackson in 1929.

'Blackbird'

By John Drinkwater

He comes on chosen evenings,
 My blackbird bountiful, and sings
 Over the gardens of the town
 Just at the hour the sun goes down.
 His flight across the chimneys thick,
 By some divine arithmetic,
 Comes to his customary stack,
 And couches there is plumage black,
 And there he lifts his yellow bill,
 Kindled against the sunset, till
 These suburbs are like Dymock woods
 Where music has her solitudes,
 And while he mocks the winter's wrong
 Rapt on his pinnacle of song,
 Figured above our garden plots
 Those are celestial chimney-pots.

'Daffodils'

By John Drinkwater

Again, my man of Lady Street,
 Your daffodils have come, the sweet
 Bell daffodils that are aglow
 In Ryton woods now, where they go
 Who are my friends and make good rhymes.

You should be borne, if all were well,
 In golden carts to Lady Street.

They come, these very daffodils,
 From that same flight of Gloucester hills,
 Where Dymock dames and Dymock men
 Have cider kegs and flocks in pen,
 For I've been there a thousand times.

Your petals are enchanted still
 And when those tongues of Orphic skill
 Bestowed upon that Ryton earth
 A benediction for your birth,
 Sun-daffodils that now I greet.

Because, brave daffodils, you bring
 Colour and savour of a spring
 That Ryton blood is quick to tell,

Robert Frost (1874-1963)

Excerpt from *Once They Lived in Gloucestershire* by Linda Hart, pgs. 91-97

Robert Frost was 38 when he left New England for a long visit to England. He had worked as a farmer and teacher in Massachusetts and New Hampshire, but had always wanted to be a poet. Only a few of his poems had been published in American newspapers and magazines; and in England he was completely unknown as a poet. When he arrived in London in 1912, he had with him a trunk full of unpublished poems in various stages of completion. His first book, *A Boy's Will*, was published in London in 1913 by David Nutt, one of the oldest and most respected publishing firms in London at that time (Walsh, p.38). Reviews were encouraging but not overly enthusiastic. Still, Frost's publisher felt confident enough to bring out another volume of his the following year. This time there was widespread acclaim for *North of Boston*, and Frost soon had a reputation as an important new poet on both sides of the Atlantic. By the time of his death in 1963, his reputation extended around the world; he was a cultural ambassador for America, a poet laureate to the world.

Frost, his wife, and four young children stayed at a London hotel for a week, while he went looking for long-term accommodation. He found a bungalow in Beaconsfield, near the new railway to London, and surrounded by Chiltern beechwoods. Two of his visits to London were especially important – when he brought his manuscript to a publisher, and when he attended the opening party for the Poetry Bookshop. At the Poetry Bookshop he met many of the Georgian poets, including Gibson and Abercrombie. They admired his first book of poems, and when Gibson was planning to move to Gloucestershire at the end of 1913, they suggested that he should leave Beaconsfield to join them in real countryside. He did this early in 1914, living first at Little Iddens and then at The Gallows.

Unraveling when and where Frost's early poems were written is not always easy. This is especially true because he seemed to enjoy, later in life, playfully confusing his many biographers and interviewers. John W. Haines, a Gloucester lawyer who was a close friend during Frost's Dymock days and corresponded with

him later, claims that most of *Mountain Interval* (Frost's third volume, published on his return to America) was written in Gloucestershire, a Little Iddens and The Gallows. But the Mertins, who interviewed him for a bibliography they produced in 1947, wrote, "...the product of Frost's poetry during the Dymock interval just about matched the produce of the Little Iddens farm. It wasn't much. 'Here I wrote some poems,' he has put it; 'but not all of them are traceable". (Mertins, p.25) However, recalling his time in Dymock, Frost says that in addition to discussing poetry, and botanizing with Haines and Thomas, he spent time in the Little Iddens apple orchard where he liked to sit and write.

It is likely that 'The Cow in Apple Time' was inspired by a pastoral scene in Dymock countryside in 1914. I say this despite the fact that Frost told a biographer in the 1950s that he wrote it "after the bronze animals on the Albert Memorial." (Sergeant, p.146) I cannot find any such animals on the Albert Memorial, and have been told by experts that there have never been animals – bronze or otherwise – on it at any time. So perhaps Frost's memory was faulty. He did spend a week in London early in 1914, before moving to Gloucestershire, taking the family around some of the places where tourists visited, so it is likely that he visited the Albert Memorial at that time. And he must have worked on the poem while living at Little Iddens in 1914 as it was published in Harold Monroe's December 1914 issue of *Poetry and Drama*. Three other Frost poems were published in the same issue – 'The Smile', 'Putting in the Seed', and 'The Sound of Trees' – and Frost wrote to Monroe to thank him for "placing me so well in such a good number of P & D". (Frost, p.143)

'Putting in the Seed' was written at Little Iddens, according to Sergeant (p.127). But the subject matter both here and in 'To Earthward' is universal – love between man and woman, and love of the earth. Eleanor Farjeon has left us a vivid picture of the Frost and Thomas families digging the potato patch beside Little Iddens (Farjeon, p.89). If Frost's memory was accurate, then 'To Earthward' was also written at Little Iddens. "Frost had very rarely written poetry in the diffusion of outdoors," says Sergeant. "But it was at Little Iddens, he assures me, 'under a plum tree' that he wrote 'To Earthward'." (p.125) Writing to Bernard de Voto 24 years later, Frost said: "One of the greatest changes my nature has undergone is of record

in 'To Earthward' and indeed elsewhere for the discerning. In my school days, I simply could not go on and do the best I could with a copybook I had once blotted. I began life wanting perfection and determined to have it. I got so I ceased to expect it and could do without it. Now I find I actually crave the flaws in human handwork." (Frost, p.482)

'The Sound of Trees' was probably written when Frost and his family moved to Abercrombie's cottage, The Gallows, in September 1914 to save money in wartime conditions. It is one of two poems that have, as a backdrop, Abercrombie's thatched cottage near the woods at Ryton. He told Sergeant that the poem was "written for Abercrombie" and is the "only one I wrote in England that had an English *subject*." (Sergeant, p.146) But the sound and sight of wind in the trees must have been familiar to him from all his years in New England. According to Haines, Frost said there were two influences: the elms near Abercrombie's cottage and a wood he remembered in New Hampshire (Street, p.128). The trees seemed to be speaking to him about difficult decisions that had to be made as a result of the war. In 1916, Gibson wrote to Frost, who was now back in America: "Your trees at The Gallows, the whole group of elms, and our elm over the shed in field, were all blown down in the same storm in the spring." (Francis, p.182) The poem was published in *Mountain Interval*, at the very end and in italics. (The first and last poems in *A Boy's Will* were also printed in italics.)

'The Thatch' also has The Gallows as a backdrop. It was Frost's wife, Elinor, presumably waiting with the light on inside, who had been so keen to go to England and live "under thatch". They were now doing that, but domestic quarrels and Frost's moodiness did not suddenly disappear. Frost (like Edward Thomas) was prone to deep if temporary depressions, after which he felt guilty at the anguish he caused his wife when these moods descended upon him. The poem was originally published in Frost's *West-Running Brook* (1928) with a note dating it to 1914.

If that is so, Frost left 'The Thatch' out of the reckoning when writing to the American, Amy Lowell, to correct some biographical errors about him in her 1917 book, *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry*. He was concerned at her implication that Gibson and Abercrombie had influenced his poetry, and he asked her to note

“that I didn’t meet Gibson till I was putting the last touches on *North of Boston* and I didn’t meet Abercrombie till after the MS was in David Nutt’s hands. It was the book that got me invited down to live with those fellows in the country. I had begun writing it in 1905. I wrote the bulk of it in 1913...You see if any of my work was in danger of *Mountain Interval* in 1914: ‘Birches’ and ‘The Hill Wife’ and ‘Putting in the Seed’ and ‘The Sound of Trees’. None of this greatly matters, but since you seem bent on accuracy, you might make a marginal note of it.” (Frost, p.219)

Throughout their time in England, the Frost children published a little magazine called *The Bouquet*. Their parents and friends were asked to help with contributions and drawings, and the Thomas family was soon involved with the project (see Francis – as Frost’s grand-daughter, with access to her mother’s papers, she has written the fullest account of his youthful creative venture.) Frost’s first contribution, ‘Pea-sticks’, appeared in the July 1914 issue of *The Bouquet* and was later published in *Mountain Interval* as ‘Pea Brush’. Frost wrote in a pocket notebook that he kept while in England: “Hollis said I could have all the brushwood I wanted to brush my peas.” (Walsh, p.224) Another Frost poem, ‘Locked Out’, appeared in the September issue of the children’s magazine. When Frost included it in the 1930 edition of *Mountain Interval*, he added the words ‘As told to a child’ beneath the poem’s title.

‘The Road Not Taken’ is one of Frost’s most famous poems. Yet only a tiny minority of those who read and re-read it know that it is a poem about Edward Thomas. The close friendship between Frost and Thomas is one of the most compelling aspects of the Dymock story. According to Walsh, the poem was drafted at The Gallows towards the end of 1914, though it was altered before its publication in America where it appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly* magazine in August 1915. It then appeared as the first poem in Frost’s third book, *Mountain Interval*, published in America in 1916.

There are two other poems Frost wrote about Thomas and the war. One is ‘A Soldier’, with its powerful image of Thomas as a fallen lance whose spirit nevertheless moves onward. At the end of 1916, Frost was increasingly distressed about the war: “What becomes of my hopes of three months ago when the drive on

the Somme began. Something has gone wrong," he wrote to Thomas on December 7, 1916. On the back of the letter Frost wrote out a poem then titled 'France, France' but later titled 'Suggested By Talk of Peace at This Time'. "Silly fools are full of peace talk over here...I wrote some lines I've copied on the other side of this about the way I am struck. When I get to writing in this vein you may know I am sick or sad or something." Thomas replied on December 31, 1916, that "I like the poem very much, because it betrays exactly what you *would* say and what you feel about saying that much. It expresses just those hesitations you or I would have at asking others to act as we think it is their cue to act." (Thomas, Letters, pp.134-5, 184-5)

Frost was devastated when he received news of Thomas's death. In his letter to Helen Thomas he wrote: "He was the bravest and best and dearest man you and I have ever known. I knew from the moment when I first met him at his unhappiest that he would some day clear his mind and save his life. I have had four wonderful years with him...I want to see him to tell him something. I want to tell him, what I think he liked to hear from me, that he was a poet...I had meant to talk endlessly with him still, either here in our mountains as we had said or, as I found my longing was more and more, there at Leddington where we first talked of war." (Frost, p.216)

'The Road Not Taken'**By Robert Frost**

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

'A Soldier'**By Robert Frost**

He is that fallen lance that lies as hurled,
That lies unlifted now, come dew, come rust,
But still lies pointed as it plowed the dust.
If we who sight along it round the world,
See nothing worthy to have been its mark,
It is because like men we look too near,
Forgetting that as fitted to the sphere,
Our missiles always make too short an arc.
They fall, they rip the grass, they intersect
The curve of earth, and striking, break their own;
They make us cringe for metal-point on stone.
But this we know, the obstacle that checked
And tripped the body, shot the spirit on
Further than target ever showed or shone.

'Suggested by Talk of Peace at This Time'

By Robert Frost

France, France, I know not what is in my heart.
But God forbid that I should be more brave
As watcher from a quiet place apart
Than you are fighting in an open grave.

And slaying till what might have been distorted
Is saved to be the Truth and Hell is thwarted

I will not ask more of you than you ask,
O Bravest, of yourself. But shall I less?
You know the extent of your appointed task,
Whether you still can face its bloodiness.

Not mine to say you shall not think of peace.
But mine, not mine. I almost know your pain.
But I will not believe that you will cease,
I will not bid you cease, from being slain.

'To E.T.'

By Robert Frost

I slumbered with your poems on my breast
Spread open as I dropped them half-read through
Like dove wings on a figure on a tomb
To see, if in a dream they brought of you,

If I was not to speak of it to you
And see you pleased once more with words
of mine?

I might now have the chance I missed in life
Through some delay, and call you to your face
First soldier, and then poet, and then both,
Who died a soldier-poet of your race.

I meant, you meant, that nothing should remain
Unsaid between us, brother, and this remained –
And one thing more that was not then to say:
The Victory for what it lost and gained.

You went to meet the shell's embrace of fire
On Vimy Ridge; and when you fell that day
The war seemed over more for you than me,
But now for me than you – the other way.

How over, though, for even me who knew
The foe thrust back unsafe beyond the Rhine,

Edward Thomas (1878 – 1917)

Excerpt from *Once They Lived in Gloucestershire* by Linda Hart, pgs. 109-115

Edward Thomas probably wrote more in his lifetime than any of the other Dymock Poets – or so it seems from his voluminous output. But until November 1914, when he was 36 ½ years old, he was the only Dymock Poet who had not written any poetry. One can't help wondering if he felt like the odd man out, especially when living near Frost, Gibson and Abercrombie during August 1914.

Thomas was a respected biographer and literary critic at the beginning of the century, but he always complained about the financial pressure he was under to produce a constant stream of books and articles. William Cooke estimates that between 1905 and 1915, "he wrote twenty-two books of prose and more than a million words in articles and reviews." (p.122) In a letter to Gordon Bottomley in 1903, complaining about having so much work to do, he tries to make light of it: "Inkitas inkitatum. All is ink." (Thomas, Bottomley, p.47) And in a 1911 letter to Harold Monroe he wrote: "I have 3 books in hand to be done before the year's end, have written 2 short ones already this year, and have just published one and am about to correct the proofs of another." (Poetry Wales, p.48)

Thomas knew, or knew of, all the Dymock Poets before he visited Frost at Leddington for the first time in April 1914. He had reviewed poetry by both Gibson and Abercrombie, and because he was so honest in his criticism, friction occasionally resulted when he did finally meet them. In 1908, Thomas had written that "Gibson long ago swamped his small delightful gift by his abundance." (*Daily Chronicle*, May 19, 1908) Four years later, Thomas wrote about Gibson's *Fires, Book I*: "...he has been merely embellishing what would have been more effective as pieces of rough prose, extracts from a diary, or even a newspaper." (*Daily Chronicle*, 9 March 1912) Thomas knew and liked Brooke, who visited him at the Thomas home in Steep, Hampshire, a couple of times, and Thomas made a return visit to Cambridge in 1910, staying with Brooke at the Orchard in Grantchester. Thomas was one of the six judges awarding Brooke a prize for the best poem in the *Poetry Review* in 1912 (although Thomas voted for Ralph Hodgson).

Thomas's friendship with Frost makes his relationship with the other Dymock Poets pale almost into insignificance. But he was undoubtedly a welcome visitor at The Gallows. Recalling the many times he was in the area, Catherine Abercrombie said: "I think Edward was the most beautiful person I have ever seen. It was quite a shock on first meeting him unless one had been warned."

(Abercrombie, C.) Elinor Frost, in June 1914, wrote to a friend: "Edward Thomas, who is a very well known critic and prose writer, has been here with his two children and he is going to bring his whole family to lodge near us through August. Rob and I think everything of him. He is quite the most admirable and lovable man we have ever known." (Frost, Letters, p.126)

A great deal has been written about the remarkable similarities between Thomas and Frost, the close friendship that sprang up between them, the ideas they shared about language and poetic diction, and most of all, Frost's role in Thomas's decision to start writing poetry.

It can be persuasively argued, for example, that Frost's long talks with Thomas were instrumental in the latter's beginning to write poetry at the end of 1914; but it can also be persuasively argued that other key influences were at work which made Thomas finally take the plunge. The war, for example, was important in two ways: there was no longer a market for Thomas's prose work, which gave him more time and freedom to write than he wanted; and it intensified his love of England, a subject often dealt with in his prose but arguably more suitable to poetry. Gordon Bottomley, Walter de la Mare and Eleanor Farjeon had already raised with Thomas the idea of his writing poetry – but he had rejected the suggestion. What Frost seems to have given him was confidence, at just the right time.

There is a great deal of evidence that Thomas, long before he met Frost, had been thinking about the need for a change in poetic diction. Motion claims that "from the outset, his [book] reviews had argued that the language of poetry should be colloquial." (p.60) And R. George Thomas says he "had been the champion of 'speech' and 'natural rhythm' in poetry for over a decade" before meeting Frost (Poetry Wales, p.36). Thomas said as much to Frost, in May 1914, though in his usual self-effacing manner: "you really should start doing a book on speech and

literature, or you will find me mistaking your ideas for mine and doing it myself. You can't prevent me from making use of them; I do so daily...However, my [book about] 'Pater' would show you I had got on to the scent already." (Poetry Wales, p.8)

In the same letter Thomas asks "whether you can imagine me taking to verse. If you can I might get over the feeling that it is impossible – which at once obliges your good nature to say 'I can'." Frost would have had many opportunities to tell Thomas 'You can' when they walked and talked their way around Leddington and Ryton, May Hill and the Malverns, during August 1914. The Thomas family rented rooms with Mr. and Mrs. Chandler, who lived at Old Fields, a farmhouse just a few meadows away from the Frosts' at Little Iddens. Helen Thomas recalled, many years later in *The Times* that "They were always together and when not exploring the country they sat in the shade of a tree smoking and talking endlessly of literature and of poetry in particular." (Thomas, Thomas p.230). In fact, Thomas's three reviews of Frost's *North of Boston* in 1914 virtually set out a manifesto for contemporary poetry; to Frost it may have seemed only a matter of time until Thomas put some of these ideas into practice himself.

But Thomas didn't take to verse until the end of the year. He wrote his first five poems between 3-7 December 1914; 'March' was one of them. He sent it with eight other poems to Frost, writing: "But I am in it and no mistake...I find myself engrossed and conscious of a possible perfection as I never was in prose...I have been rather pleased with some of the pieces...Still, I won't begin thanking you just yet, thought if you like I will put it down now that you are the only begetter right enough." (Thomas, Thomas, p.256)

In this poem, Thomas certainly paid heed to what Frost told a friend that he had told Thomas: that he was already writing poetry "but in prose form where it did not declare itself and gain him recognition. I referred him to paragraphs in his book *In Pursuit of Spring* and told him to write it in verse from in exactly the same cadence." (Eckert, p.150) There are passages in the book indicating that Thomas did exactly that. The theme of 'March' recurs frequently in Thomas's poetry: how to discover nature's secret, and whether there are words adequate to express it.

'Old Man', the fourth poem Thomas produced, was actually written in prose form three weeks earlier – again indicating that Frost's advice was being taken seriously. Andrew Motion traces prose passages from both Thomas's autobiography and from childhood memories in *The South Country* that contain sources for the poem (p.164). When Frost sent this and several other poems by Thomas to the editor of an American poetry magazine in January 1917, he wrote: "Here I sit admiring these beautiful poems but not daring to urge them on anyone else for fear I shall be suspected of admiring them from love of their author." He concluded that "Old Man' is the flower of the lot, isn't it?" (Frost, Letters, p.209)

Today, critics often remark on how this early poem raises so many typical Thomas themes. "This sense of searching, of having mislaid the key," says Jan Marsh, "is one of the central themes of Thomas's life and work." (Marsh, Thomas, p.10) And Motion notes that "Old Man" summarises every theme and technique that Thomas used in his pursuit of wholeness." (p.168)

Anyone who has ever tried to write prose or poetry will appreciate the sentiments expressed in Thomas's lovely poem, 'Words'. The original manuscript has no title, but is headed "Hucclecote – on the road from Gloucester to Coventry." (Cooke, p.248) In July 1915, Thomas visited John Haines who lived at Hucclecote, a village just outside Gloucester, before continuing on his journey north. Thomas wrote to Frost that they went "cycling about and talking of you." (Thomas, Poems, p.148) Haines also recalled the visit: "A few days before he enlisted we bicycled out to May Hill...and all the way he mused, and I could note him musing as he asked me questions of the scarce flowers by the way, and whilst I botanised on the hill slopes he sat on the hill...composing the beautiful poem 'Words', which he brought down completed for us at breakfast the next morning." (Haines)

As Cooke discusses in detail (pp.137-45), Thomas had always been interested in the nature and use of words. This can be traced, for example, in his biographies of Jefferies, Maeterlinck, Swinburne and Pater. There is space here only for one of his more amusing comments, regarding Pater: "On almost every page of his writing words are to be seen sticking out, like the raisins that will get burnt on an ill-made cake. It is clear that they have been carefully chosen as the right and effective words,

but they stick out because the labour of composition has become so self-conscious and mechanical..." (Ibid., p.140)

In the summer of 1915, Gordon Bottomley showed Lascelles Abercrombie and R.C. Trevelyan some copies of Thomas's poems (Bottomley was one of the few people who knew Thomas was writing poetry), as the three of them were planning *An Annual of New Poetry* for publication. Abercrombie and Trevelyan agreed at once to include them. When Thomas heard that they wanted to publish his poems, he wrote to Bottomley: "I was keeping them rather secret. However, I am so pleased at having Abercrombie's liking that I should not dream of complaining." (Thomas, Bottomley, p.253)

Thomas saw the proofs of this anthology while on military leave in December 1916; eighteen of his poems were being published under the pseudonym – Edward Eastaway – that he insisted on using. The *Times Literary Supplement* reviewed the book on 29 March 1917, and John Freeman immediately sent the review to him in France. A few days before his death on April 9, he would have read these words about his poetry: "He is a real poet, with the truth in him."

But he never saw the published book, nor did he see *Poems* by Edward Eastaway published in July 1917. Thomas had given the completed manuscript for this volume to Roger Ingpen of the publishing firm of Selwyn and Blount. Ingpen was Walter de la Mare's brother-in-law, and Thomas had met him in August 1916. Eckert, Thomas's first biographer, says that "Mr. Ingpen stated that Thomas gave him the manuscript of these poems just before leaving England for the Front. It is generally said that the book was in the press when Thomas was killed in France, 9 April 1917." (Eckert, p.242) When *Poems* appeared, there was a dedication after the title page: "To Robert Frost". This was the first book ever dedicated to him.

'The Sun Used to Shine'

By Edward Thomas

The sun used to shine while we two walked
Slowly together, paused and started
Again, and sometimes mused, sometimes talked
As either pleased, and cheerfully parted

Each night. We never disagreed
Which gate to rest on. The to be
And the late past we gave small heed.
We turned from men or poetry

To rumours of the war remote
Only till both stood disinclined
For aught but the yellow flavorful coat
Of an apple wasps had undermined;

Or a sentry of dark betonies,
The stateliest of small flowers on earth,
At the forest verge; or crocuses
Pale purple as if they had their birth

In sunless Hades fields. The war
Came back to mind with moonrise
Which soldiers in the east afar
Beheld then. Nevertheless, our eyes

Could as well imagine the Crusades
Or Caesar's battles. Everything
To faintness like those rumours fades –
Like the brook's water glittering

Under the moonlight – like those walks
Now – like us two that took them, and
The fallen apples, all the talks
And silences – like memory's sand

When the tide covers it late or soon,
And other men through other flowers
In those fields under the same moon
Go talking and have easy hours.

'Words'

By Edward Thomas

Out of us all
That make rhymes,
Will you choose
Sometimes –
As the winds use
A crack in a wall
Or a drain,
Their joy or their pain
To whistle through –
Choose me,
You English words?

I know you:
You are light as dreams,
Tough as oak,
Precious as gold,
As poppies and corn,
Or an old cloak:
Sweet as our birds
To the ear,
As the burnt rose
In the heat
Of Midsummer:
Strange as the races
Of dead and unborn:
Strange and sweet
Equally,
And familiar,
To the eye,
As the dearest faces
That a man knows,
And as lost homes are:
But though older far
Than oldest yew, -
As our hills are, old, -
Worn new
Again and again;
Young as our streams
After rain:
And as dear
As the earth which you prove
That we love.

Make me content
With some sweetness
From Wales
Whose nightingales
Have no wings, -
From Wiltshire and Kent
And Herefordshire,
And the villages there, -
From the names, and the things
No less.

Let me sometimes dance
With you,
Or climb
Or stand perchance
In ecstasy,
Fixed and free
In a rhyme,
As poets do.

To find out more about the
Dymock Poets, visit
www.dymockpoets.co.uk
the web site of

The Friends of the Dymock Poets
a literary society.

Find out about their
Poetry readings, lectures,
concerts, guided walks
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When you join, you receive
An annual journal,
Regular newsletters and
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Apply to the
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of the Friends of the Dymock Poets:

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Tel 01254 662923
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The Friends of the Dymock Poets

WORDS

OUT OF US ALL
THAT MAKE RHYMES,
WILL YOU CHOOSE
SOMETIMES—
AS THE WIND IS
I CRICK IN A WALL
OR A DRAIN,
THEIR JOY IN THEIR PLAY
TO WHISPER THROUGH—
CLOSE ME,
YOU ENGLISH WORDS?

Edward Thomas

The poem "Words" was written
by Edward Thomas on May Hill.
The panel was designed by
Carrie May

Visit the Dymock Poets Exhibition



at
St Mary's Church,
Dymock,
Gloucestershire

Come and walk
THE POETS PATHS
to

celebrate **SIX POETS** who made
Dymock a rural centre of creativity
in 1914

Discover the literary heritage of
Lascelles Abercrombie, Wilfrid Gibson,
Robert Frost, John Drinkwater,
Rupert Brooke and Edward Thomas.

explore Dymock Woods where **Robert Frost** chose ***The Road Not Taken***

'Two roads diverged in a yellow wood...'

You can

wander through meadows and orchards where **Edward Thomas** walked with **Robert Frost**

'The sun used to shine while we two walked
Slowly together, paused and started
Again and sometimes mused, sometimes talked
As either pleased, and cheerfully parted
Each night, we never disagreed
Which gate to rest on.'

First published in Dymock was **Rupert Brooke's**
The Soldier

*"If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is forever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed."*

John Drinkwater came from Birmingham to Dymock:
*'...The scent of ploughland is calling me away,
 The chatter of the rooks, the open skies,
 And she I know is waiting with the glory of the day
 And the shadow of the night in her eyes.'*

Lascelles Abercrombie, the focus of the group, once wrote of Dymock's famed wild daffodils:

'...if quicksilver were gold

And troubled pools of it shaking in the sun,
It were not such a fancy of bickering gleam
As Ryton daffodils when the air stirs.
And all the miles and miles of meadowland
The spring makes golden ways
Lead here...

Wilfrid Gibson's feelings of affection and tenderness were intensified by the presence of lapwings over the Dymock fields:
*"All night under the moon
 Plovers are flying
 Over the dreaming meadows of silvery light"*

A new multi-media exhibition describes how important literary work came to be written in this corner of north-east Gloucestershire at the beginning of the 20th century.

POETS BY MOCK

The Exhibition includes:

- information boards
- children's section
- events board
- audio visual presentations

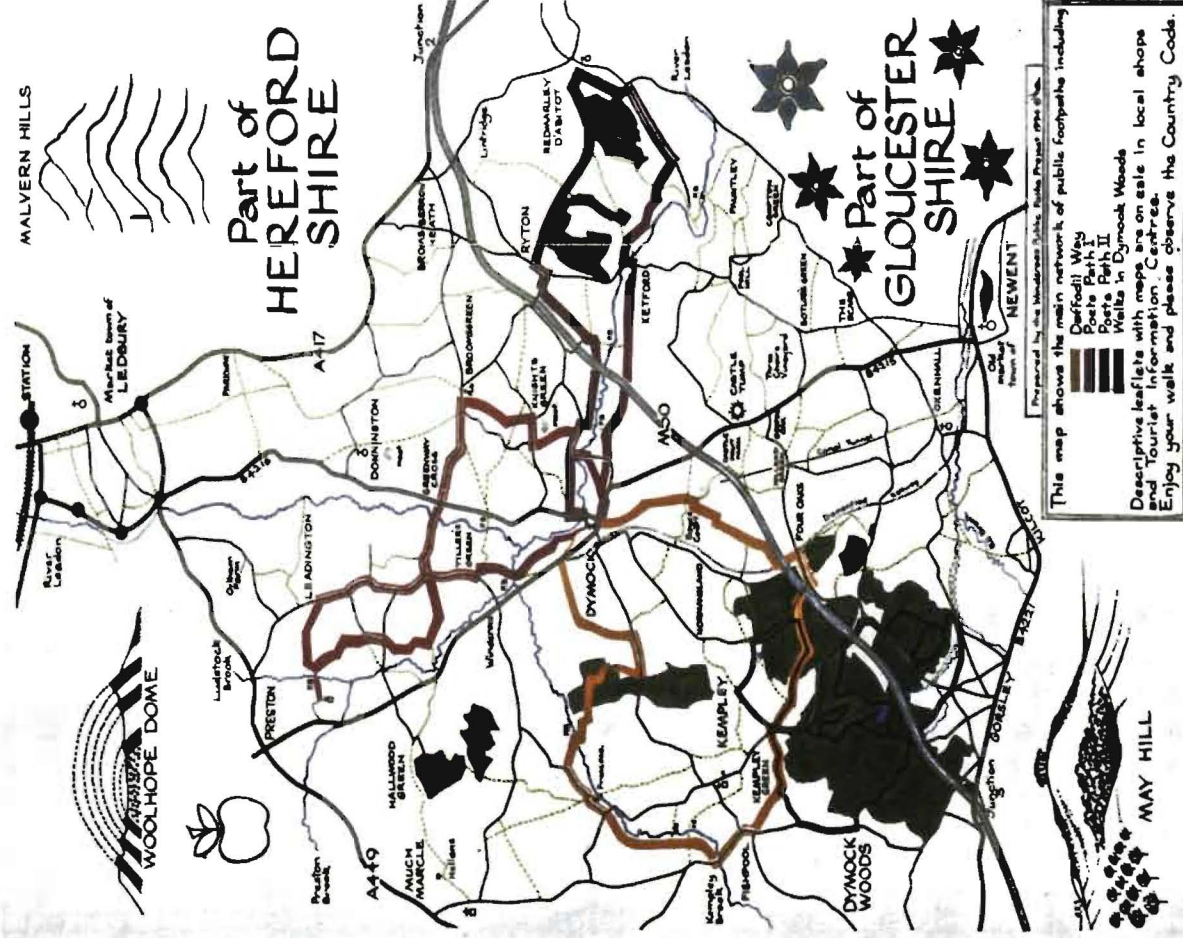
For sale:

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A comprehensive resource and education pack is available for Project work.

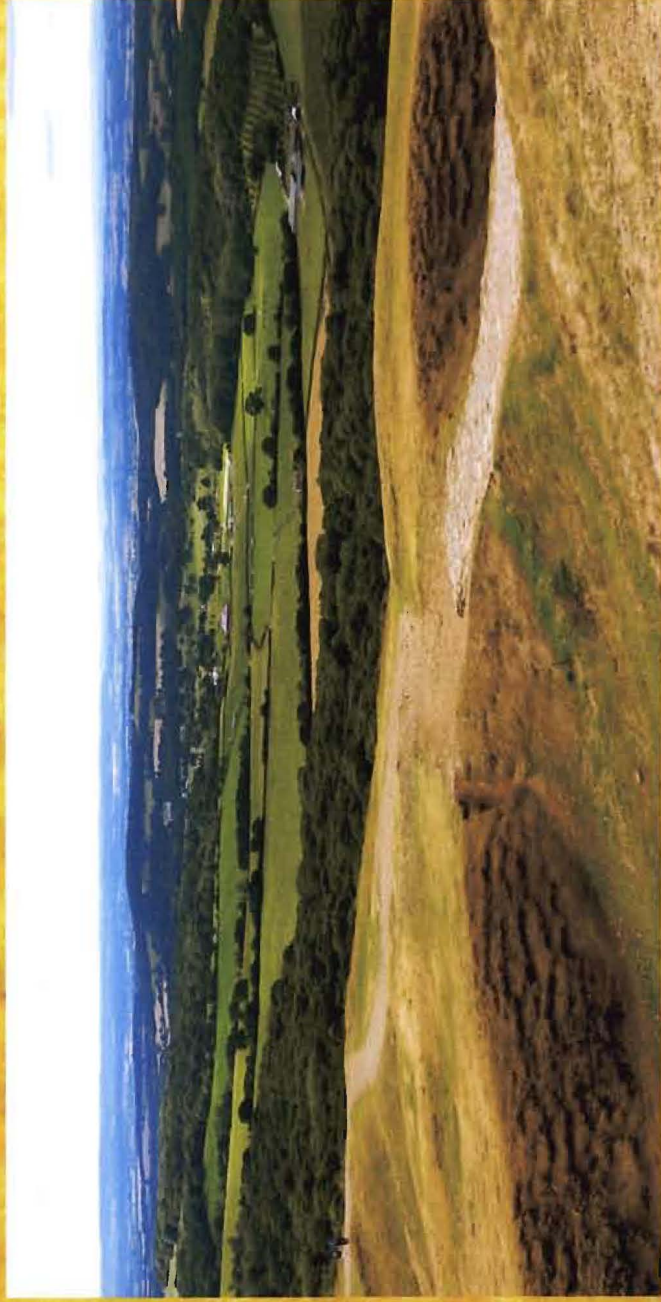


Fabric collage "May Hill"
by Sue Williams



Once They Lived in Gloucestershire

A Presentation about the Dymock Poets of Dymock, England



Dymock Poets

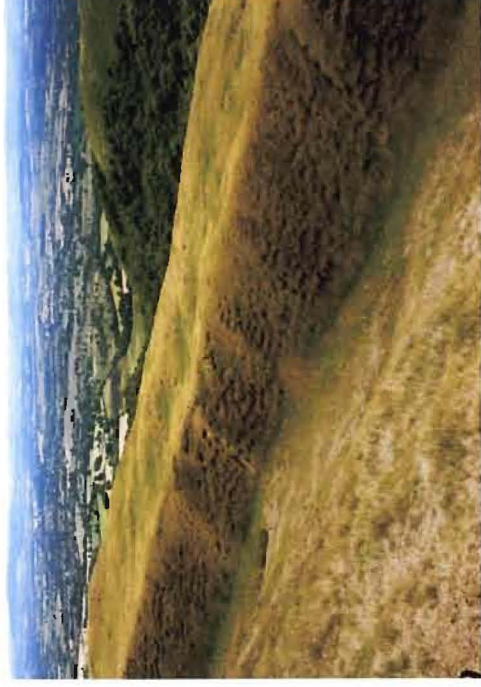
■ The Dymock Poets were a literary group of men in the early 20th century who found common interest and inspiration in Gloucestershire, more specifically in the town of Dymock, England.

■ The group consisted of six poets: Lascelles Abercrombie, Wilfrid Gibson, John Drinkwater, Rupert Brooke, Robert Frost, and Edward Thomas.



Beautiful Country

- The Dymock Poets were deeply influenced by their surroundings. Perhaps you can see why...
- The Malvern Hills



Friends of the Dymock Poets

■ In October 1993, the Friends of the Dymock Poets was formed to commemorate the Dymock Poets, and to protect the countryside between the Malvern Hills and May Hill so that future generations can continue to enjoy it.

■ The Friends organize social and literary events throughout the year, arrange guided walks in the Dymock Poets countryside, and publish informative newsletters with many book reviews.

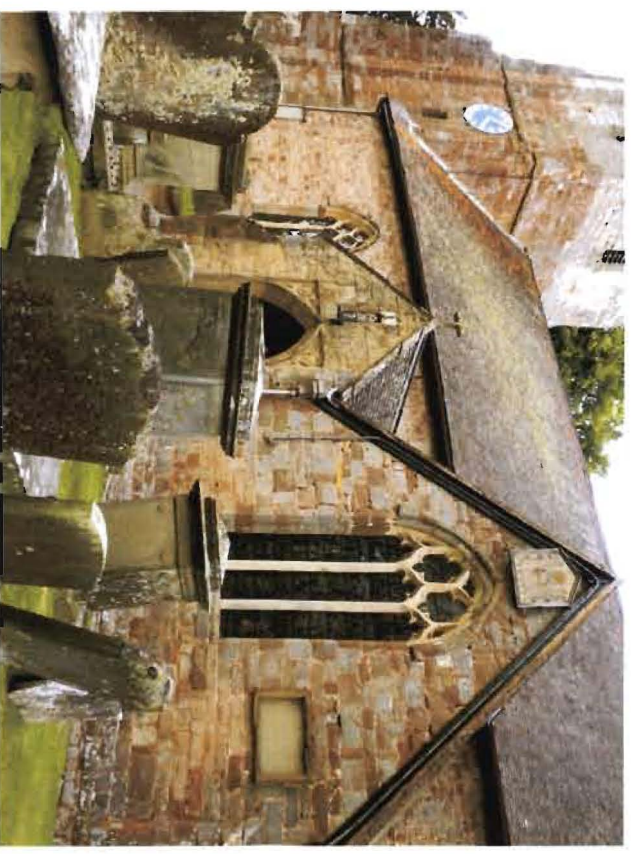
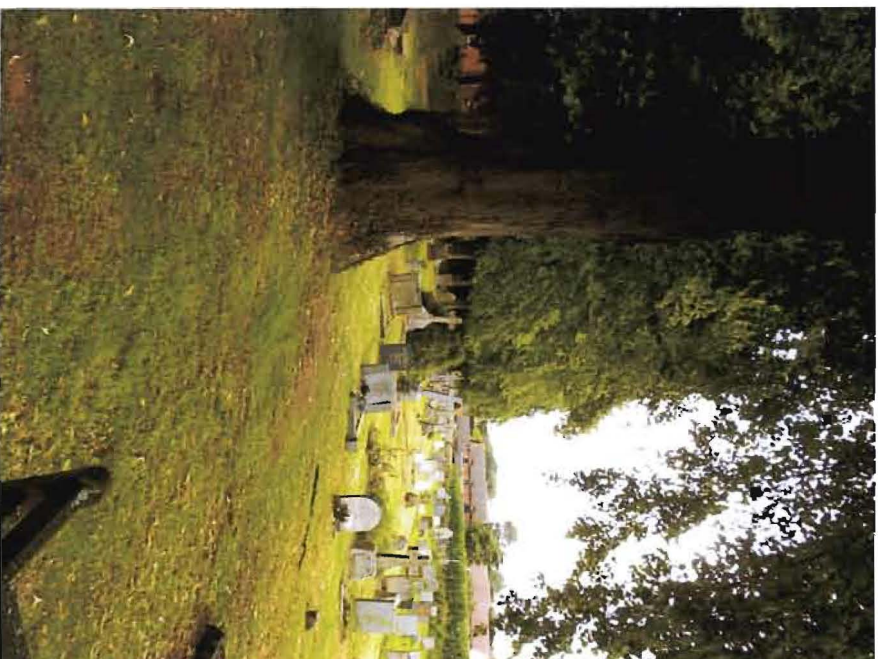


Dymock Poets

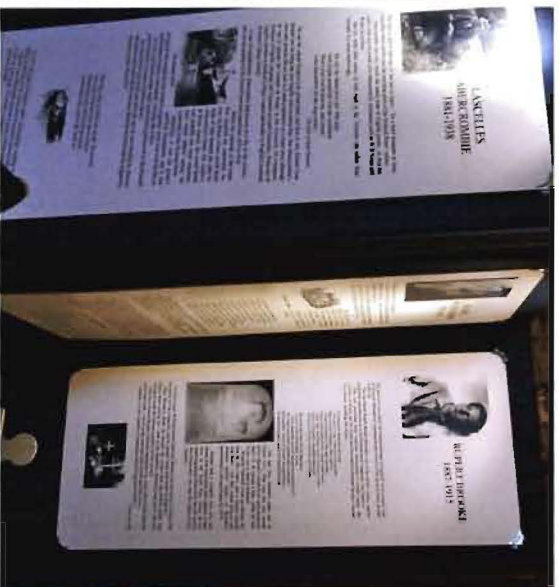
- I was fortunate enough to be able to visit one of the literary events sponsored by the Friends of the Dymock Poets and walk along the countryside that was such a huge inspiration to these poets.
- Here are photos I took of the land and exhibition:



Photos



Photos



Photos

